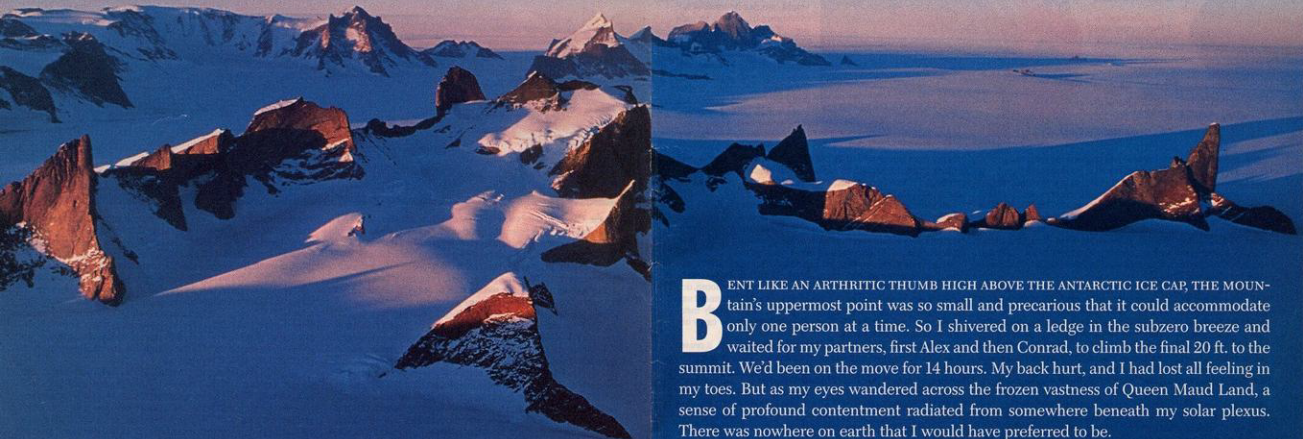


WILL THERE BE ANY WILDERNESS LEFT?

BY JON KRAKAUER

Yes, there will be a few untamed spots, and if we're lucky, very few people will go and visit them



Frozen Bastion:
Antarctica's Queen
Maud Land is still
unspoiled—for now

BENT LIKE AN ARTHRITIC THUMB HIGH ABOVE THE ANTARCTIC ICE CAP, THE MOUNTAIN'S uppermost point was so small and precarious that it could accommodate only one person at a time. So I shivered on a ledge in the subzero breeze and waited for my partners, first Alex and then Conrad, to climb the final 20 ft. to the summit. We'd been on the move for 14 hours. My back hurt, and I had lost all feeling in my toes. But as my eyes wandered across the frozen vastness of Queen Maud Land, a sense of profound contentment radiated from somewhere beneath my solar plexus. There was nowhere on earth that I would have preferred to be.

The mountain, called the Troll Castle, is an unearthly fin of weathered granite that pokes a vertical mile from its ice-bound surroundings. Only a handful of people knew, or cared, that it existed; fewer still had actually laid eyes on the peak. Alex, Conrad and I were the first who had gone to the trouble to climb it, and the view from the top was ample reward. Countless other rock towers, equally strange and beautiful, rise from the ice in all directions, resembling gargantuan sailboats plying a chalk-white sea.

For a month we'd been climbing and exploring in this corner of Antarctica. To visit such a wilderness in the waning moments of the 20th century struck us as a rare and fleeting privilege—an incredible stroke of good luck. Keeping this firmly in mind, we went to extraordinary lengths to minimize our impact on the place so that others would find it in a similarly pristine condition. When we departed, we even packed out our accumulated feces. I couldn't help thinking, however, that 100 years in the future, or even 50,